

St Edmundsbury Cathedral



The First Sunday of Advent
30 November 2025
St Edmundsbury Cathedral
Sermon by the Revd Canon Katy Cunliffe

Advent is, I think, my favourite time of year with today, Advent Sunday, being one of my favourite days. And this isn't just because purple is my favourite colour and because we get some great music – although that definitely all helps! I love the excitement; the sense of longing for Christmas to hurry up; the sense of expectation and anticipation at what is to come. And although, for most people, that excitement and longing and expectation and anticipation is mainly about Santa and presents and parties and time with family, for us as Christians it is, of course, also about Jesus. Not just Jesus the baby, whose birth we will celebrate at Christmas, but Jesus the Son of Man who will come again with power and glory to judge the world, to make all things new, to fulfil all that God has promised.

But as much as I love Advent, today's readings make me feel rather anxious. Because I am someone who likes to know what is happening when. I'm not good with surprises. I like order and routine and timetables and itineraries. I can cope with most things – as long as I know what to expect. As long as I know what, where and when something is going to happen.

And I think that's because I like to be well prepared for things. I like to have thought things through, to have planned out (at least in my mind if not on paper) what I will say and do in any forthcoming situation. I like to rehearse conversations before I have them and envisage how things will go.

All of these are, I think, very helpful qualities for a Canon Precentor to have and they stand me in good stead when it comes to organising liturgy.

They are, however, less helpful when it comes to awaiting the second coming. Because Matthew makes it abundantly clear in today's Gospel that the Son of Man will come at an unexpected hour. Only the Father knows when it will be – not even the angels or Jesus know. So I stand no chance of being able to plan it into my schedule, setting time carefully aside to prepare and rehearse.

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I am not alone in my desire to know when this might happen. For the whole of history, Christians – and others – have been trying to work out when Jesus will come again and the world as we know it will end. It's a very understandable question but Matthew shows us that it is the wrong question to be asking. For we are not expected to – and neither do we need to – *know* everything. But we are expected to *do* something.

On the one hand, the work of the second coming, the work of justice and peace, the work of salvation and the redemption of all people and all things, is God's work. God is at work on the large scale, sending instruction out of Zion, judging the nations, arbitrating for many peoples. As Christians, however bad things may be in the world around us or in the messiness of our own lives, we always have hope because we know the end of the story. And the story does not end with war but with peace. The story does not end with hatred and discrimination but with love and justice. The story does not end with death but with life. God has it all in hand and so we need not worry or despair.

But at the same time, the work of the second coming, the work of justice and peace, the work of salvation and the redemption of all people and all things, is very much our work. For we are part of the story and God calls us to a life of activity here and now.

It matters that we learn God's ways and walk in God's paths.

It matters that we live honourably.

It matters that we do all we can to work for peace, yes throughout the world but also in our own communities, our own families and our own lives.

It matters that we use our voices to speak out for those who have no voice.

It matters that we challenge injustice wherever we see it – be that in the world, in the communities to which we each belong, in the church as a whole or here at the Cathedral.

It matters that we work to overcome discrimination.

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It matters that we are each mindful of our own privilege and biases and that we strive to overcome them.

It matters that we build an inclusive church that welcomes, celebrates and affirms every person, regardless of disability, economic power, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, learning disability, mental health, neurodiversity, or sexuality.

It matters that we build a safe church where everyone matters, where everyone is heard, where everyone is valued, and where everyone is protected from abuse or exploitation.

It matters that we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in both word and deed so that all people may know how much they are loved.

It matters that we work to protect and renew God's creation.

It matters that we recycle our rubbish, reduce our water usage, and switch off the lights.

It matters that we help those in need, both globally and locally.

It matters that we are generous with our time, our talents and our money.

It matters that we are kind and patient with one another.

It matters that we keep awake and are ready for the Lord's coming.

For when it comes to the work of justice and peace, of salvation and redemption, the cosmic and the ordinary belong together. The hope and the expectation of Advent are firmly connected to how we live day by day.

We may not know when Christ will come again. We may not be able to plan it into our schedules. But we can prepare and we can be ready.

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So come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Let us put on the armour of light.

Let us live honourably.

And let us work for justice and peace, for the salvation and redemption of all people and all things.

Amen.